Organizational Character and Constitution of the League for Socialist Action/ Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière

10 cents

Our Organizational Character

Adopted by the May/1968 convention of the League for Socialist Action/

Ligue Socialiste Ouvrière

The revolutionists in Canada, in order to achieve their aim of establishing socialism, will have to overcome one of the most powerful concentrations of economic, political and cultural power ever assembled.

While the strength to overcome this capitalist powerhouse and its ruthless and cynical defenders is embedded in the ranks of the working class, the construction of the vanguard party that is absolutely essential to carry through the revolution is still in its infancy.

The LSA/LSO, the accumulation of all the efforts to build this party which got seriously underway in 1919 has not only shown itself to possess the essential program for the socialist revolution, thanks primarily to the world movement of which it is a part, but to also have in general shown itself capable of working out the strategy and tactics, of applying this program: within the possibilities of the objective situation and its own limited forces.

The revolutionary optimism that permeates its ranks, its emphasis on the possibilities that reside in the overall situation is not only justified

but necessary in order to build the vanguard party. But this must not be permitted to blind us from seeing where we are at, and from coming to as clear as possible an understanding of the nature of the party that is needed and how we are going to build it.

The party that can settle accounts with the capitalist power will have to be a mass party with effective forces in the major urban centers with extensive resources for propaganda and agitation at its disposal. Above all, it will have to be a thoroughgoing working class party with deep and genuine roots in the working class and all its varied forms of political, social and cultural expression. It will be a party of workers who are leaders in their own right, on the job, in the union, who, through the disciplined, centralized, coordinated action that the party will give to their work, will be leaders of the class.

The gap between what we are now and what we must become – from a tiny propaganda force to a mass party will be overcome neither by wishful thinking nor by impatient ultimatums, but by serious political work which will project our expanding forces into positions which will give it the opportunity to take advantage of the crises that the traditional working class organizations are going to go through,

In order to achieve this aim, in order to build the mass revolutionary proletarian party, what organizational norms should we now seek to establish? What do the historic experiences of the world revolutionary process and of our own movement tell us? An understanding of this is necessary, all the more in that our movement has suffered a serious lack of continuity in its cadre and that our new forces coming into the movement have not only been deprived of very necessary experiences, but have brought alien concepts into our ranks from the petite- bourgeois student and reformist NDP-NDY milieu. Furthermore our movement, is strung across thousands of miles – with a further complication, in a two nation, two language state, so that the close and intimate working relationship that is highly desirable has been considerably curbed.

The vanguard party of necessity rejects any and all concepts of a federated structure, of regional or area power centres, with their own leaders who from time to time work out an operational relationship with one another. The vanguard

party requires not only a common program but a common strategy if it is to develop the power necessary to struggle against and conquer over the highly class conscious bourgeoisie and its political agents both inside and outside the ranks of the working class. Its work must be organized on a pan-Canadian basis not only to bring the largest forces possible into play at one given time and thus have the greatest impact, but to lift up and forward the weaker components and to inspire those yet to come off the sidelines of the party into its ranks. It must be a centralized party, guided by the principles of democratic centralism under a central 1eadership.

Only a self-acting and critically-minded membership is capable of forging and consolidating such a party and solving its problems of collective thought, discussion and experience. From this follows the need of assuring the widest party democracy in the ranks of the organization.

Only a party with complete discipline in all public activities under a strong and firm leadership and centralized direction with the power to act promptly and effectively in the name of the party and to supervise, coordinate and direct all its activities without exception, can lead the class to power.

Given the program, an atmosphere that makes it possible to implement it with the greatest possible expedition must prevail in the party. Such a party cannot be built spontaneously or haphazardly but must be continuously and consistently and consciously built.

The work of the party must be regularized at every level. It must be methodical, it must be thorough and it must be consistent. As much of the work of the party as possible must be put on a routine basis so that the party, without any break in continuity, can take advantage of new opportunities without the generation of a continual crisis atmosphere.

Campaigns and actions must not be sucked out of the thumb of some "leader", some idea-man or innovator, but must rise out of the party's collective assessment of the situation, its connections with the mass movement, and the indicated direction of the masses in specific situations. The revolutionary party must continuously struggle against sloppiness in its work, hit and miss drifting, counting on something to happen to provide a new opportunity, All its activities must be on a serious business basis – from recruitment to the allocation of its funds and above all its' politics. This holds true for every level of the movement even including its internal educational work. They must be designed to serve the political needs of

the movement to develop the cadre and not provide an opportunity for someone to sound off on some "new" or "interesting" idea.

The revolutionary socialist party cannot be a talkshop or a debating society, an arena for the dissemination of interesting and innovating ideas by the informed and precocious, but an instrument of struggle – a struggle that involves the most immediate needs of the workers, who will only be won to its ranks if it aids them in their day to day anti-capitalist struggle – and which will determine – the ultimate fate of all humanity.

One of the things that the party demands is loyalty, not only in the form of commitment and dedication to the party on the part of the leaders and the membership, but in the form of pride in the party's program, in its membership and its leadership, and confidence in its future. Without such loyalty, the party, a voluntary association, will never withstand the pressures of its enemies and in fact would not long exist.

Loyalty is not some abstract moral concept; it means not only loyalty to the program and principles, but to the entire membership of the party up to and including the leadership. The party is responsible for the actions of its membership, and every member is responsible for the party, everything about the party, including its leadership. The relationship of the leadership to the membership is not one of martinet or taskmaster – nor the membership to the leadership that of critic or goad – it is one of mutual respect, confidence and loyalty.

The leadership is under the control of the membership, its policies always open to criticism, discussion and rectification, within properly established forms and limits, and the leading bodies themselves subject to formal recall and/or alteration. The membership has the right to demand and expect the greatest responsibility from the leaders precisely because of the position they occupy in the movement.

But sustained party activity, not broken or disrupted by abrupt or disorienting changes, presupposes not only a continuity of tradition and a systematic development of party policy, it also presupposes a continuity of leadership.

The central leadership of the party will be forged out of the experiences of the movement. As the policies of the party will be determined by the party membership

in conventions – so will the leadership be selected to implement that policy.

The revolutionary party cannot be led by amateurs, no matter how gifted, who make themselves available to the movement from time to time –even if for lengthy periods. The vanguard party requires professional leaders who are sustained by the movement and can thereby be selected with no regard whatsoever to their individual financial circumstances, but entirely on their record of selfless commitment and dedication to the movement.

It requires a leadership of men and women who have consciously decided that the revolution is to be their lifetime work and who, freed from the necessity to earn a living, are in a position to develop all the requisite skills of an effective revolutionist, and to accept any assignment that the movement gives them.

The Central Committee (C.C.), the highest body of the party between conventions can only be composed of persons who have shown that they have committed their lives completely to the party, that they are completely loyal to the party and are prepared to d e vote their full time to the party any time and any place should the C.C. demand it of them.

The Political Committee (P.C.), chosen by the central committee from its ranks is the functioning central authority of the party between plenary sessions of the C.C. All party organs and bodies are under the supervision of the political committee and are required to comply with any directives of the P.C. between plenums *(scheduled meetings, often documented --ed.)* of the C.C., pending appeal to the plenum.

The leadership is not exclusively the central political working group in Toronto – the P.C. – it is the plenum of the C .C. Between plenums the C.C. has the responsibility to keep all C.C. members informed of important developments and problems as they arise in the movement. Thus, C.C. members can, when they see fit, more effectively advise the P.C. of their opinions so that the P.C. can function most sensitively in its day-to-day leadership of the movement. Within the resources of the movement and at its discretion this can be done through the circulation of reports of developments, problems and decisions related to the varied activity of the movement. Plenums are essential to the development of the leadership of the party and essential to the effective functioning of the movement. It is only through them that the entire leadership comes into play and has an opportunity to function

as a leadership, to thrash out differences that may develop as a leadership, and gives direction as a leadership to the movement.

The *Workers' Vanguard* and *La Lutte Ouvrière*, particularly at this stage of our development, are the major focus of our activity. The party press is the decisive public agitational and propagandist expression of the vanguard party. Through them the official position of the movement on the long range issues and the day-to-day problems is expressed. The policy expounded in the press is based on the accumulated positions of the movement as established by convention and decisions of the central committee not in conflict with such positions. Control of the press lies in the central committee and the editorial board struck off by it which is expected to loyally guide itself by the decisions of the convention.

The views expressed by contributing and regional editors do not supersede the authority of the editorial board which is subject to the central committee. It is the responsibility of the P.C., which is responsible to the C.C. to veto any demand for the publication of any material if it considers such material harmful to the interests of the party.

The problem of the party, wrote James P. Cannon in one of his important contributions in this field, is the problem of the leadership of the party. The leading cadre plays the same decisive role in relation to the party that the party plays in relation to the class. Given the program, the construction of leading cadres is the key to the construction of revolutionary parties – the construction of the leading cadre requires an even higher degree of consciousness and a more deliberate decision than the former.

Our concept of leadership rejects cliquism, cultism and the hodge-podge assembly of talented individuals. It is that of a leading cadre – consciously constructed on a continuing basis over the years. It is of a team of individuals who know how to work together, who can arrive at a division of labor, the cohesiveness of which is based on a combination of faults as well as strengths, that reflects the tendencies in the party so that the leadership carries the whole party forward.

It is inevitable that differences develop in the movement. A properly conducted discussion of differences where all comrades hear all points of view and the whole movement is drawn into the discussion

helps to hammer out a correct line and educate the membership.

Concentration on private discussions on the fringe of the movement tends to give comrades involved a one-sided view, lines them up quickly and prejudices their thinking before they have heard the open party debate and warps their capacity for objective political judgment. Such conduct arises from and tends to develop into personal and unprincipled clique politics in the party which must be mercilessly fought against.

The vanguard party seeks to be a homogeneous movement. While there may be tendencies and even factions in its ranks at any given moment, Bolshevism rejects any concept that factions are normal or even desirable, and that the party is some kind of loose federation of factions. Tendency alignments in the party are a serious business and should not be considered as necessarily leading to the formation of factions. Factions can paralyze a party, and they can force others into the organization of counter-cliques so that there is no longer a single cadre in the leadership of the party. Headless factions can tear a party apart. Differences within the movement should not be exaggerated. Should they develop so that they seem to take on a fundamental character, they tend to lead to a showdown struggle for control of the party entailing the possibility of a split. There have been incidents in the past when opposition tendencies did not know how to conduct themselves and the leadership did not know how to come to grips with them, resulting in completely unjustified, unnecessary splits, and setting back the movement for whole periods.

The party should be able to resolve episodic differences without resort to factionalism. Internal party disputes should be conducted in a responsible and disciplined way so as to safeguard party unity, educate the membership in principled politics, and allow it to function dynamically in its public activity. When the party has made its decision on the disputed issues, groupings formed during the polemical struggle should be dissolved into the party as a whole.

At this stage of its development, the LSO/LSA has very limited human and material resources at its disposal. The challenges that lie before it are truly awesome. But it has already been clearly

demonstrated that there is no other force that is capable of playing the liberating role that we have set ourselves. Thus our attitude to our movement is very aptly summed up in the words of Trotsky: "We will never forget that our party is now the greatest lever of history. Separated from this lever, every one of us is nothing, With this lever in hand, we are all."

CONSTITUTION

And declaration by Leon Trotsky

Article I. Name

The name of the organization, is the Canadian section of the Fourth International, (Herein after referred to as 'the League.")

Article II. Purposes

The purpose of the League shall be to educate and organize the working class for the abolition of capitalism and the establishment of a workers' government to achieve socialism.

Article III. Membership

Section 1. Every person who accepts the aims and purposes of the League and agrees to submit to the discipline of the League and engage actively in its work, shall be eligible to membership.

Section 2. Every member must belong to a duly constituted branch of the League in the territory where he resides, or at his place of work, if such a branch exists. In territories where no branch exists, applicants shall be admitted as members-at-large.

Section 3. All applicants for membership shall be endorsed and recommended by two persons who have been members for not less than three months. Action by the League branch on application for membership takes place in the absence of the applicant.

Section 4. A member desiring to leave one locality for another must apply to his branch for permission, If a branch exists in the new locality they shall be notified in advance of the pending move. If no branch is in this area the member shall become a member-at-large. All transfers shall be subject to the approval of the P.C. *(Political Committee -- see below --ed.)* and/or the C.C. *(Central Committee -- see below --ed.)*

Section 5. The Central Committee is empowered to accept groups or organizations of individuals, eligible under Section 1. of this Article, as members en bloc, and to assign them to the proper branches.

Article IV. Units of Organization

Section I. The basic unit of the League shall be the branch formed on a territorial or occupational basis, A branch shall consist of not less than 3 nor more than 50 members, When a branch achieves a membership of 50, it shall be subdivided into two branches. Exceptions can be made only by permission of the C.C.

Section 2. Wherever two branches exist in the same locality, a local executive committee shall be formed by elections at a joint membership meeting. Where three or more more branches exist in the same locality, a local executive committee shall be elected at a city convention.

Section 3. In such cases as may be decided by the Central Committee, provincial or district executive committees, elected by provincial or district membership meetings or by local or district conventions, shall be formed.

Article V. Administration

Section 1. The highest governing body of the League is the convention of

the Canadian section. Its decisions shall be binding upon the entire membership

Section 2. Between League conventions, the authority of the convention subject to the decisions of the convention itself, is invested in the C.C. elected by the convention.

Section 3. The Central Committee shall be comprised as follows:
Para. 1. The number of the C.C. members shall be determined by each convention of the Canadian section for the succeeding period and the members shall be elected by the convention of the section.
Para. 2. The convention of the Canadian section shall also elect alternates to fill vacancies in the C.C. in the number and order decided upon by the convention.
Para. 3. Members of the C.C. may be dropped from the committee and/or from the League only by vote of the convention of the Canadian section. Members of the C.C. may, however, for cause be suspended from membership and be barred from all rights as members, pending final decision of the League convention, by vote of two-thirds of the membership on the C.C.

Section 4. The Central Committee directs all the work of the League, decides all the questions of policy in accord with the decisions of the convention, appoints subordinate officers and sub-committees, including the political committee, and, in general, constitutes between conventions the functioning authority of the League.

Section 5 . The Political Committee is the functioning continuing body between C.C. meetings. It acts for the C.C. between such meetings. It is a subordinate body of the C.C. and all its decisions are subject to the approval of the C.C.

Section 6. The local governing body of the League shall be the local executive committee, or where only one branch exists, the branch executive committee. Where provincial or district executive committees shall be constituted, the Central Committee shall decide their relation to the local and branch executive committees.

Section 7 The branch executive committee shall be elected by the membership of the branch, and is subordinate to the branch membership. Its duties are to direct the activities of the branch, and to

act with full powers for the branch between branch meetings. This section applies likewise to local executive committees.

Article VI. Control Commission

Section 1. The convention shall elect a Control Commission of three members with full authority to investigate any individual or circumstance which it may deem necessary; and shall have power to delegate any of its authority to representatives.

Section 2, The control commission, on completion of its investigations in each case, shall present its findings and recommendations to the Political Committee for action. Action shall be taken by the P.C., or by the C.C. in those cases referred to it by the P.C.

Section 3. In those cases where the Control Commission finds it necessary to intervene, its authority shall supercede any local investigation or trial.

Section 4. It shall be obligatory on every member of the League to furnish the Control Commission or its authorized representatives with any information they may require.

Article VII. Membership and Dues.

Section 1. Each member shall pay monthly dues of fifty cents. In addition, all members are expected to make regular voluntary contributions in accordance with their means.

Section 2. Unemployed members or housewives not monetarily employed, shall pay dues of twenty-five cents per month.

Section 3. All dues as defined by this constitution, collected through the branches shall be remitted to the central office (C.O.)

Section 4. Branches will finance all higher organs of the League which may be set up – including the C.O., on a quota basis determined by mutual consultation. Dues of members-at-large shall be paid

directly to the C.O.

Section 5. Members who are three months in arrears in payment of dues shall cease to be members in good standing and shall be so notified by the branch executive committee. Members six months in arrears shall be stricken from the rolls of the League.

Article VIII. Discipline

Section 1. All decisions of the governing bodies of the League are binding upon the members and subordinate bodies of the League.

Section 2. Any member or organ violating the decisions of a higher organ of the League shall be subject to disciplinary actions up to expulsion by the body having jurisdiction.

Section 3. Charges against any member shall be made in writing and the accused member shall be furnished with a copy in advance of the trial. Charges shall be filed and heard in the branch to which the member belongs, or in a higher body which may decide to act directly in the case. Charges filed before the branch shall be considered by the branch executive (or a sub-committee elected by it) at a meeting to which the accused member is summoned. The branch executive committee shall submit a recommendation to be acted upon by the membership of the branch. Charges considered by higher bodies of the League shall, however, be acted upon by said bodies.

Section 4. Action by any unit or organ in disciplinary cases deemed improper by a higher unit, may be changed by direct intervention of a higher body.

Section 5. Any member subjected to disciplinary action has the right to appeal to the next higher body up to and including the convention of the Canadian Section. Pending action on appeal, the decision of the League body having jurisdiction remains in full force and effect.

Section 6, Persons who in the past have been expelled from the League or

who have resigned from it may not be readmitted to the League without the approval of the C.C.

Section 7. Questions decided by the League convention may be subjects of new discussion only when such discussion is formally authorized by the C.C. or in the established pre-convention discussion period.

Section 8. Political collaboration with non-members of the League must be formally authorized by the League committee having jurisdiction.

Article IX. Qualifications for Election

Section 1. Except in the case of newly organized branches, members of local and branch executive committees must have been members of the League for at least the preceding three months, and members of the district committee must have been members of the League for at least the preceding six months.

Section 2. Members of the Central Committee must be members of the League for at least one year.

Article X. Conventions of the Canadian Section

Section 1. Conventions of the Canadian Section shall be held at least every two years. Special conventions may be called by the C.C. or on the demand of branches representing one-third of the membership.

Section 2. The call for the convention, together with with an agenda and the proposals of the C.C., shall be issued at least sixty days before the date of the convention for discussion in the local organizations and the official publications. An Internal Bulletin shall be issued during the convention discussion period.

Section 3. Representation at the convention shall be proportionately based upon dues-paying membership at the time of the branch election of delegates to the convention. The Central Committee shall levy a compulsory assessment to finance the convention of the Canadian Section, from which totally unemployed members

may be exempted. Branches organized after the convention call shall have fraternal representation.

Section 4. Regular members of the C.C., if not regular delegates shall be fraternal delegates to the convention.

Section 5. The C.C. shall appoint an auditing committee to make periodic audits of the financial accounts of the central office and central League departments and institutions, and report on same to the central committee. Branch, local and district committees shall appoint auditing committees to make periodic audits of the financial accounts of the corresponding League units and of League departments and institutions responsible to said unit.

Article XI, Amendments

Amendments shall be made to this constitution by majority vote of the convention of the Canadian Section.

Article XII. Press

All organs of the League are subject to and under the direction of the League and the C.C.

We are not a party as other parties. Our ambition is not only to have more members, more papers, more money in the treasury, more deputies. All that is necessary, but only as a means. Our aim is the full material and spiritual liberation of the toilers and exploited through the socialist revolution. Nobody will prepare it and nobody will guide it but ourselves. The old Internationals – the Second, the Third, that of Amsterdam, we will add to them also the London Bureau – are rotten through and through.

The great events which rush upon mankind will not leave of these outlived organizations one stone upon another. Only the Fourth

International looks with confidence at the future. It is the world party of Socialist Revolution! There never was a greater task on the earth. Upon every one of us rests a tremendous historical responsibility.

Our party demands each of us, totally and completely. Let the philistines hunt their own individuality in empty space. For a revolutionary to give himself entirely to the party signifies finding himself.

Yes, our party takes each one of us wholly. But in return it gives to every one of us the highest happiness: the consciousness that one participates in the building of a better future, that one carries on his shoulders a particle of the fate of mankind, and that one's life will not have been lived in vain.

The fidelity to the cause of the toilers requires from us the highest devotion to our international party. The party, of course, can also be mistaken. By common effort we will correct its mistakes. In its ranks can penetrate unworthy elements. By common effort we will eliminate them. New thousands who will enter its ranks tomorrow will probably be deprived of necessary education. By common effort we will elevate their revolutionary level. But we will never forget that our party is now the greatest lever of history. Separated from this lever, everyone of us is nothing. With this lever in hand, we are all.

L. TROTSKY October 18, 1938 Coyoacan, D.F. (Mexico)